

Soldiers
Online



Without Warning,

Story by MSG Bob Haskell
Photos by SSG Ken Walker

There is much more to sniper training than shooting at targets more than a quarter of a mile away.

TO the untrained eye, a six-foot man standing before a tree line 628 meters away is little more than a figment of a soldier's imagination. Holding that man in the cross-hairs of a telescopic sight and killing him with a single shot from a high-powered rifle requires the specialized skills taught

on the open ranges and woods of a remote facility in central Arkansas, a few miles north of Little Rock.

The National Guard Sniper School, established in 1993 at Camp Joseph T. Robinson, has come of age in one important way. The Army accredited the specialized school last December, and instructors there will soon be training active Army soldiers in the deadly art and science of deliberately stalking and killing an enemy, without

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Without Remorse



Sniper School associate instructor SPC Kristopher Hector demonstrates that a sniper's low crawl is very low and slow — measured in inches rather than feet.

remorse and at great distances.

Active-duty soldiers from the 7th Special Forces Group are scheduled to begin sniper training at Camp Robinson this month, said LTC Carlon Smith, the National Guard Marksmanship Training Unit's chief of operations. National Guard soldiers from the 29th Infantry Division will train there in July.

The school will also conduct two pilot courses in counter-sniper tactics

for the Air National Guard's security forces this year.

The National Guard sniper course is modeled on the Army's five-week sniper school at Fort Benning, Ga.

Even though a recent class expended more than 9,000 rounds of 7.62mm ammunition during a two-week session, there is much more to sniper training than shooting at targets more than a quarter of a mile away.

Students must score 70 percent on

the Army Physical Fitness Test to get in. Six-mile runs in the morning, many pushups and sit-ups, and forced marches with 60-pound packs are part of the drill. Only the strong succeed.

Twenty-one reported for the first two weeks of marksmanship training in February. Eleven graduated and earned the right to return within the next year for two more weeks of field craft — the skills in camouflage and stalking that are required to see and perhaps kill



SSG Ryan McNamara reports sight-adjustment data and assists in range estimation as fellow student SGT Matthew J. Eastman takes aim at a target 600 meters downrange.

the enemy, then leave the area undetected.

That's a typical attrition rate, said 1SG Jim Green, who made it through the course when he was 52. "It darned near killed me," he added about the school, which is meant for the young.

Approximately 48 men make it through the two phases each year, said Smith, who estimated that "with full funding and staff, we could probably train 100 people per year."

"The second phase is a lot more stressful than Phase I," said Nebraska Army Guard SSG Kenneth Winn, who recently completed the Camp Robinson course. "You and your partner are carrying your weapons and 65-pound packs, including the camouflage 'ghillie' suits. You're out on field problems for two days at a time. You have to have a sound mind and body."

So why do we still need snipers during this era of high-tech warfare?

Most light-infantry battalions have three two-man teams — snipers and observers — who serve two functions. Their main purpose is to kill enemy soldiers, and instill fear in others, from long distances. The secondary mission, as their commander's forward eyes and ears, is to evaluate enemy strength and movement.

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The second function has become as critical as the first, said SSG David Broseus, one of two instructors from Fort Benning who monitored February's training at Camp Robinson.

"We need snipers more than ever to infiltrate enemy positions and gather information and to take out targets



Instructor SGT Tim Deaton checks marksmanship with the "big eye" spotting scope.

SSG Danny Stoneman of Company B, 19th Special Forces Group, records the targets of opportunity for review.

with no collateral, unintended damage," he said. "Collateral damage has become a big concern because of the Army's peacekeeping missions.

"Sometimes it's best to put a sniper in a visible position to act as a deterrent," Broseus said. "Every time you have troops on the ground, you should have a sniper over-watching them."

However, FM 23-10, the Army's "Sniper Training" field manual, makes no bones about the primary purpose. "The sniper must be able to calmly and deliberately kill targets that may not pose an immediate threat to him. ... The sniper must not be susceptible to emotions such as anxiety or remorse."

The work is not nearly as exciting as Hollywood would have people believe, Broseus said.

"A sniper team is more likely to have to take out a machine gunner, to slow an enemy's rate of fire," he explained. "You will not be looking for people like Saddam Hussein."

How well does the National Guard school prepare people to do that duty? Very well, maintained SSG Tom Dow, another Fort Benning instructor.



“The intensity of the training is the same as it is at Benning,” he explained. “Guard soldiers put in the same number of hours and days during their two two-week phases as we do in five straight weeks. We take the weekends off. They don’t.”

And the Camp Robinson facility is also equal to the task, he added.

“I’m amazed at how large this place is,” marveled Dow, who has become a frequent visitor. “It was definitely a surprise. This is not the little National Guard armory operation I was expecting.”

Building 4901 on Camp Robinson is a modest metal structure that houses the Army’s only accredited sniper school other than the Fort Benning facility.

The motto chalked onto the blackboard as an introduction for the February class — “Without Warning, Without Remorse” — could also be the school cadre’s motto. They offer students few second chances.

You can’t score 70 percent on your entry PT test? You’re gone. You can’t estimate the range to your targets? You’re history. You can’t hit 14 of 20 targets 300 to 600 meters away during



SPC John Parodi uses binoculars to scan the target area, looking for a route that will provide cover from the “enemy.”



Instructor SSG Brent Boatright leads the class to a stalking exercise.

day or night record fire? Good-bye.

That’s because SFC Ben Dolan and his six other instructors know that lives are at stake, that sniper teams must adapt to their changing environments when the weather is at its worst, and that not planning for the smallest detail could bring disaster to the mission.

“We’re teaching a unique skill,” the chief instructor said. “If the students can’t handle it for two weeks at a time



SSG Dominic Barnello uses orange spray paint to mark areas of poor camouflage on **SPC Clint Weishahn’s** ghillie suit.

here, they can’t handle a real-world mission. We train as if we’re going to war the next day. I’m not giving anyone a certificate I wouldn’t want to go into the woods with tomorrow.” □



SFC Ben Dolan supervises the low-crawl demonstration.